RECLAMATION
Managing Water in the West

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Transfer of up to 20,500 acre-feet of Central Valley Project Water from Central California Irrigation District to San Luis, Panoche, Del Puerto and Westlands Water Districts and up to 5,000 acre-feet of Central Valley Project Water from Firebaugh Canal Water District to San Luis Water District or Westlands Water District

FONSI-10-02

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
South-Central California Area Office

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Recommended by:

_____ Date: _____
Shauna McDonald
Wildlife Biologist
South-Central California Area Office

Concurred by:

_____ Date: _____
Mike Kinsey
Acting Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist
South-Central California Area Office

Concurred by:

_____ Date: _____

Chief, Resource Management Division
South-Central California Area Office

Approved by:

_____ Date: _____
Laura Myers
Deputy Area Manager
South-Central California Area Office

Background

In accordance with the National Environment Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the South-Central California Area Office of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has determined that an environmental impact statement is not required for the approval of a transfer of up to 20,500 acre-feet (af) of Central Valley Project (CVP) water from Central California Irrigation District (CCID) to Panoche Water District (PWD), Del Puerto Water District (DPWD), San Luis Water District (SLWD) and/or Westlands Water District (WWD) and a transfer of up to 5,000 af of CVP water from Firebaugh Canal Water District (FCWD) to SLWD or WWD (Transfer Recipient Districts). This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's Environmental Assessment (EA) Number 10-02, *Transfer of up to 20,500 acre-feet of Central Valley Project Water from Central California Irrigation District to San Luis, Panoche, Del Puerto and Westlands Water Districts and up to 5,000 acre-feet of Central Valley Project Water from Firebaugh Canal Water District to San Luis Water District or Westlands Water District*, dated February 2010, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

California has experienced a severe drought in recent years that has reduced water supplies to many Central Valley Project (CVP) contractors. South-of-Delta (SOD) CVP water service contractors experienced reduced water supply allocations in 2007, 2008, and 2009 due to hydrologic conditions and regulatory requirements. The hydrologic conditions for 2010 are still evolving, and although conditions have improved somewhat since the beginning of the water year, it is likely that SOD CVP contractors will still need to supplement supplies to meet demands because of past dry years, relatively low reservoir storage levels, and overall CVP operational constraints. SOD CVP contractors thus need to identify additional supplies to avoid shortages for their customers.

The proposed transfers are intended to allow expeditious water delivery so as to assist in offsetting the effects of the critical month allotment plan by increasing the volume of water available to PWD, DPWD, SLWD and WWD. This CVP water is needed immediately by the Transfer Recipient Districts to meet in-district irrigation demands.

Proposed Action

For the first Proposed Action, Reclamation proposes to approve the transfer of up to 20,500 af of well water pumped from within CCID to the Transfer Recipient Districts in the months of April 2010 through December 2010. Common landowners in CCID and the Transfer Recipient Districts, in accordance with the CCID policy entitled “Rules Governing Pumping of Private Wells for Credits in Other Districts” (See Appendix A), would pump up to 75 cubic feet per second (cfs) (up to a total of 150 af/day) of groundwater to meet CCID’s internal in-district demands in lieu of taking surface water deliveries dedicated to CCID under the San Joaquin Exchange Contractor’s Contract (Exchange Contract). This well water would be discharged into CCID’s conveyance system freeing up CVP water under the Exchange Contract to be delivered to the Transfer Recipient Districts via the DMC and/or SLC. In exchange, the 20,500 af of Exchange Contractor CVP water would be delivered to the Transfer Recipient Districts from the DMC and/or SLC.

For the second Proposed Action involving FCWD, Reclamation proposes to approve the transfer of up to 5,000 af of FCWD's Exchange Contract CVP supplies to WWD and/or SLWD from April 2010 through December 2010 and April 2011 through December 2011. Firebaugh Canal Water District would pump up to 15 cfs (up to a total of 30 af/day) of groundwater to meet their internal in-district demands in lieu of taking surface water deliveries dedicated to FCWD under the San Joaquin Exchange Contractor's contract. Wells 1-4 would not deliver water into Mendota Pool and the water would be directly discharged into FCWD's Intake Canal, but well #5 would deliver water into Mendota Pool where it would then enter the Intake Canal. The additional 30 af/day of water which would be left in the Mendota Pool would be used by Reclamation to meet its other obligations in the Mendota Pool and in exchange 30 af/day of water would be delivered to SLWD and WWD off of the DMC and/or San Luis Canal (SLC).

Reclamation's finding that implementation of the Proposed Action will result in no significant impact to the quality of the human environment is supported by the following findings:

Findings

Water Resources

The transfers of 20,500 and 5,000 af would offset a small portion of the total 2010 and 2011 surface water supply deficit in the Transfer Recipient Districts and allow the delivery of surface water during the months of March through December 2009. The water transfer would be a minor offset to the surface water delivery reductions in the Transfer Recipient Districts, but individual growers would benefit.

Water supplies in CCID and FCWD would continue to meet agricultural water demand despite the transfer. Central California Irrigation District would pump an equivalent amount to offset surface water deliveries. This transfer would be required to be in compliance with CClD's transfer policy and maintain the balance in the groundwater basin. The pumping for transfer equates to 19.9 percent of the 10-year average Exchange Contractor groundwater pumping of 128, 053 af/y. The CClD and FCWD groundwater pumping may be offset by a reduction in groundwater pumping in the Transfer Recipient Districts where groundwater overdraft is not under control.

The wells pumping under the Proposed Action would be pumping from 180 to 240 feet – a relatively shallow level.

Due to the shallow zone from which the wells are pumping the groundwater being intercepted is water that is normally replenished annually. There has been no overdraft experienced in the unconfined aquifer. Additionally, since the wells are pumping a relatively small quantity from an area of no other groundwater pumping and the pumping is being done from the shallow zone, subsidence is unlikely to occur. The Mendota Pool Group reports have shown that pumping from shallow aquifers does not cause subsidence.

The low quality groundwater pumped into the CCID's distribution system is required not to increase the total dissolved solids (TDS) in CCID's canals to more than 700 mg/L. The 5,000 af of low quality groundwater pumped into the FCWD's distribution system has been calculated to

change the TDS in FCWD's Intake Canal by no more than 30 mg/L. This water quality impact is within the normal water quality fluctuation in the canal system due to Delta pumping tidal influences and other influences.

Under the Proposed Action CClD and FCWD would have sufficient water supplies to meet their water demands. CVP and SWP facilities would not be impacted as the transferred water must be scheduled and approved by Reclamation and DWR. No natural streams or water courses would be affected since no additional pumping or diversion that would not have happened under the No Action Alternative would occur. There would be a minor positive impact to surface water resources and a slight negative impact to groundwater resources due to the Proposed Action.

Air Quality

Most of the wells that would be pumped have electric motors and the other two have the latest tier three diesel engines. These low emission engines would not reach the de minimis threshold and therefore a conformity analysis is not required under the Clean Air Act and there would be only a slight impact on air quality. The air quality emissions from electrical power have been considered in environmental documentation for the generating power plant.

Land Use

Land fallowing is still expected due to the severity of the water shortage, however the infusion of up to 15,000 af of additional water supplies would preserve some vineyards or orchards that might otherwise have been abandoned.

There would be no land use changes in CClD or FCWD as their water supply quantity is not changing. There would be a slight positive impact on land use in the Transfer Recipient Districts due to the ability of some established row crops to remain in production and the enhanced survival of orchards.

Biological Resources

Most of the habitat types required by species protected by the ESA do not occur in the project area. The Proposed Action would not involve the conversion of any land fallowed and untilled for three or more years. The Proposed Action also would not change the land use patterns of the cultivated or fallowed fields that do have some value to listed species (i.e. the kit fox) or birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). Since no natural stream courses or additional surface water pumping would occur, there would be no effects on listed fish species. No critical habitat occurs within the area affected by the Proposed Action and so none of the primary constituent elements of any critical habitat would be affected.

The short duration of the water availability, the requirement that no native lands be converted without consultation with the USFWS, and the stringent requirements for transfers under applicable laws would preclude any impacts to wildlife, whether federally listed or not.

Cultural Resources

Transferring water as described in the Proposed Action would not result in impacts to archeological or cultural resources. These lands are agricultural lands that have undergone

cultivation and land disturbance for more than 20 years; therefore, there will be no change in land use. A determination has been made that there is no potential effect to cultural resources.

Indian Trust Assets

There are no tribes possessing legal property interests held in trust by the United States in the water involved with this action, nor is there such a property interest in the lands designated to receive the water proposed in this action. There are no ITAs, Indian Reservations, or public domain allotments found within CCID, FCWD, PWD, DPWD, SLWD or WWD.

Socioeconomic Resources

The Proposed Action would allow for continued water deliveries to the Transfer Recipient Districts and would help to maintain the stability of the agricultural market and economical vitality for the San Joaquin Valley to some degree. The proposed transfer would not interfere with SWP or CYP priorities or operations.

The water service transactions are temporary actions and do not result in long-term increases in water supplies that would encourage urbanization or construction

Environmental Justice

The Proposed Action would not cause dislocation, changes in employment, or increase flood, drought, or disease. The Proposed Action would not disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged or minority populations. Some amount of agricultural production that would not be sustained with the current water availability would continue with the resulting preservation of jobs. The high unemployment rate in and around the Transfer Recipient Districts suggests that any actions that maintain seasonal jobs should be considered beneficial. Employment opportunities for low-income wage earners and minority population groups would be within historical conditions. Disadvantaged populations would not be subject to disproportionate impacts.

Global Climate Change

Under the Proposed Action, only two of the engines used for pumping would not be electric, and these two have the latest low-emission diesel engines. Therefore, there would be only a negligible contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.

Cumulative Effects

Additional transfers to the Transfer Recipient Districts are under development. Transfers in this dry year will not provide sufficient water to meet the full irrigation demand in these districts. Therefore there will be no adverse cumulative impact of additional transfers in or groundwater deliveries via Warren Act contract on land uses, biological resources, or socioeconomics. Since there was no impact to cultural resources or ITAs there is no cumulative impacts to these resources. The pump in project is under the de minimis standard for federal agencies under the Clean Air Act so again there are no cumulative impacts to air quality.

The Exchange Contractors have committed to a policy of no net depletion of groundwater over the next ten years. Based on a review of groundwater levels over the past ten years, no net substantial change in groundwater storage has occurred within the Exchange Contractors service area. The average annual volume of groundwater pumped over the period from 1993 to 2002 was

approximately 130,000 af/y. As discussed in the previous section on water balance, it appears that a pumping rate of 130,000 af/y can be sustained without creating an overdraft condition in the Exchange Contractors service area. The Exchange Contractors propose no more than 20,000 af/y of transfer water to be developed from groundwater in a normal year. Under current practices, approximately 6,000 af/y of transfer water is developed through groundwater pumping (D. Steiner, pers. comm., 2004).

Given the small amount of the increase, the groundwater pumping component of the proposed transfer would likely have little or no direct effect on groundwater levels or flow patterns within the source area over the 25-year duration of the various Exchange Contractor programs. Furthermore, ongoing groundwater monitoring would detect any negative impacts that CCID pumping may have on nearby wells or the depth to water. These impacts are prohibited under the CClD's policy entitled "Rules Governing Pumping of Private Wells for Credits in Other Districts". The cumulative impact of groundwater pumping is minimal.

The proposed transfer, when added to other actions, would not contribute to significant increases or decreases in environmental conditions. These water service actions would be temporary lasting only through December 2011. The Proposed Action was found to have no adverse impact on water resources, biological resources, cultural resources, ITAs, air quality and socioeconomics and therefore there is no contribution to cumulative impacts on these resources areas. Slight beneficial impacts to land use and environmental justice are within the historical variations and would not contribute to cumulative impacts. Overall there would be no cumulative impacts caused by the Proposed Action.